



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

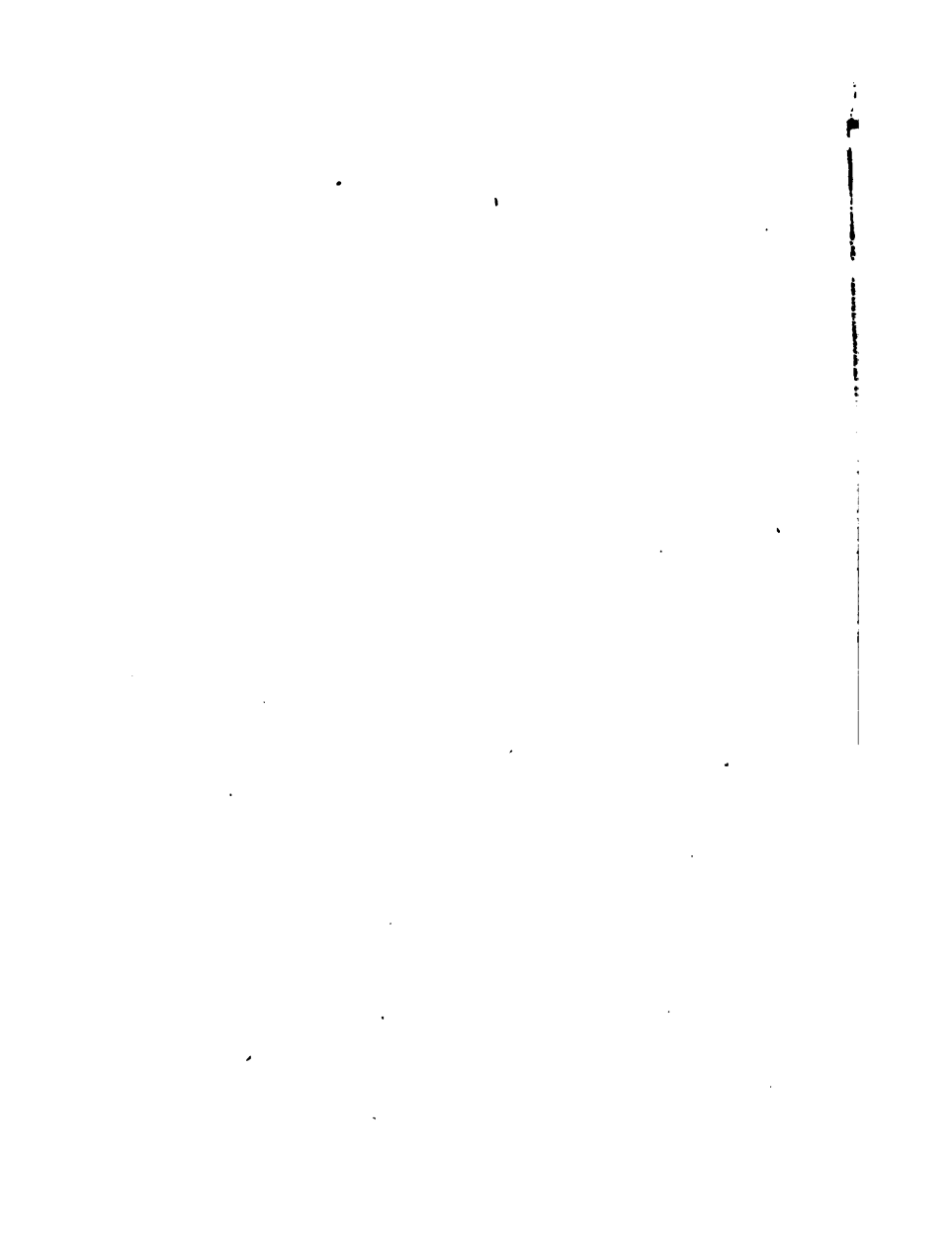
BIRDS OF GAY PLUMAGE



SUN · BIRDS · & CO



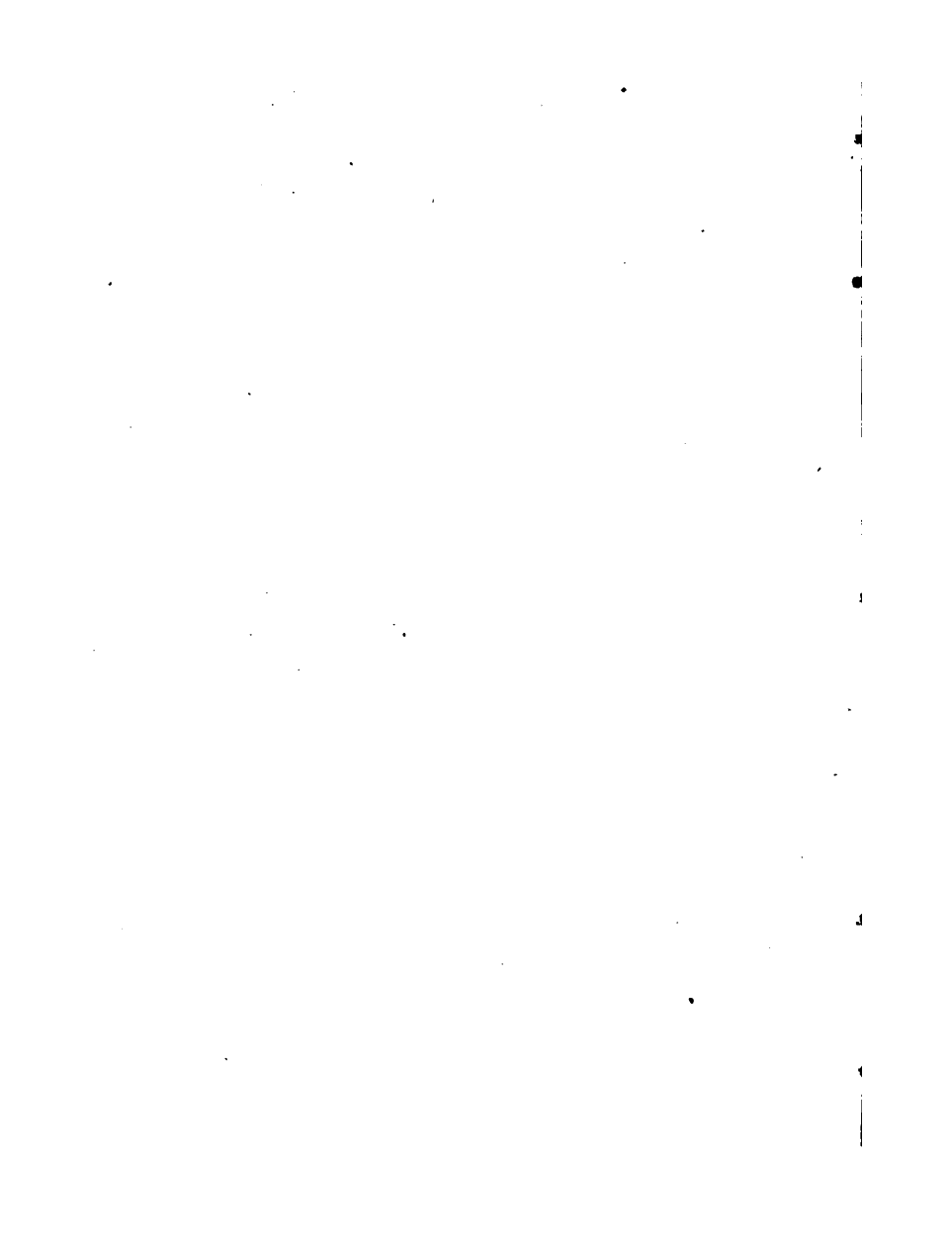


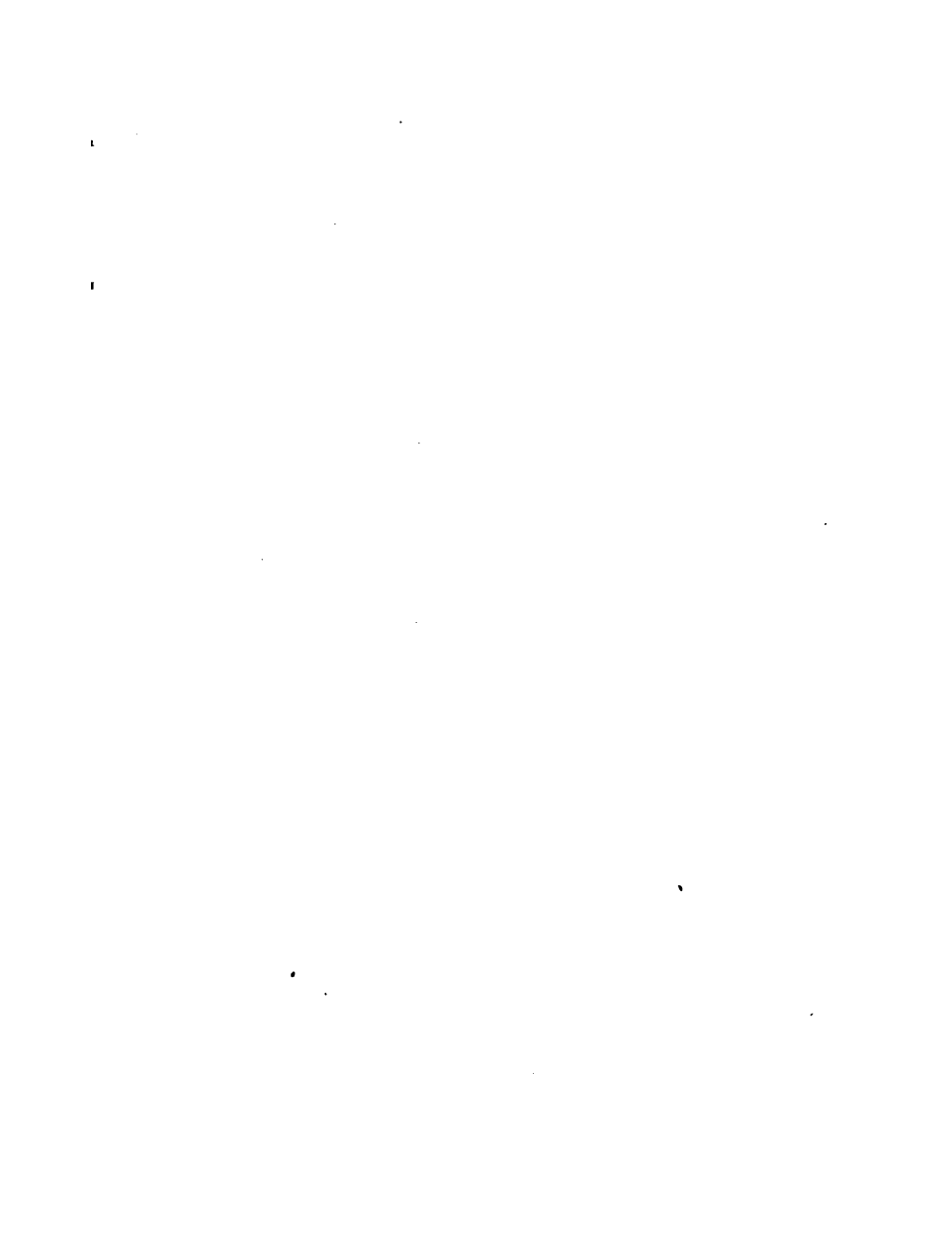




BIRDS OF GAY PLUMAGE.









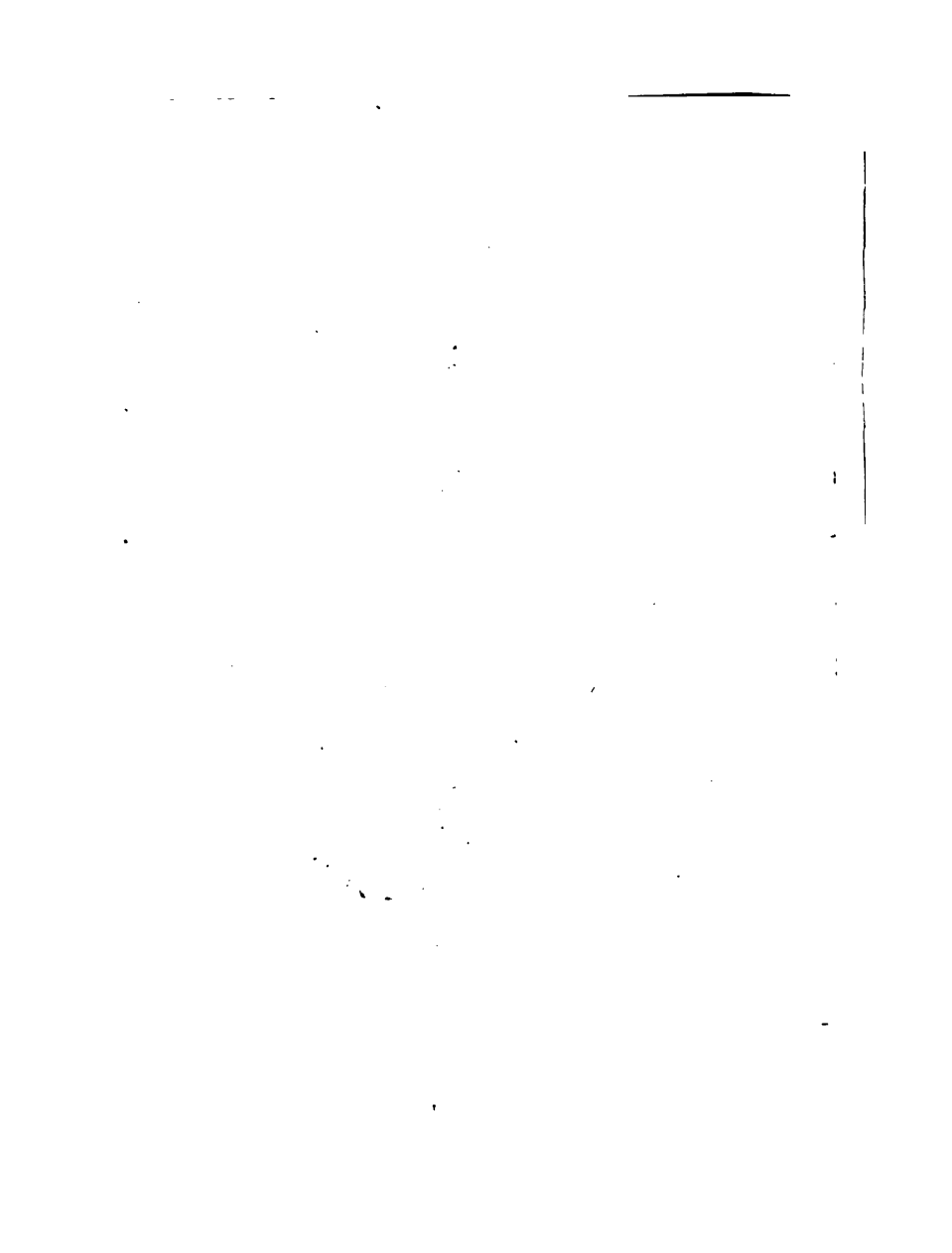


BLUE & YELLOW MACCAW & WHITE PLUMED SHRIKE

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

|

189. g. 173.





# BIRDS OF GAY PLUMAGE:

*SUN-BIRDS, &c.*

BY

Mary and Elizabeth Kirby,

AUTHORS OF "THINGS IN THE FOREST," "THE WORLD  
AT HOME," ETC.

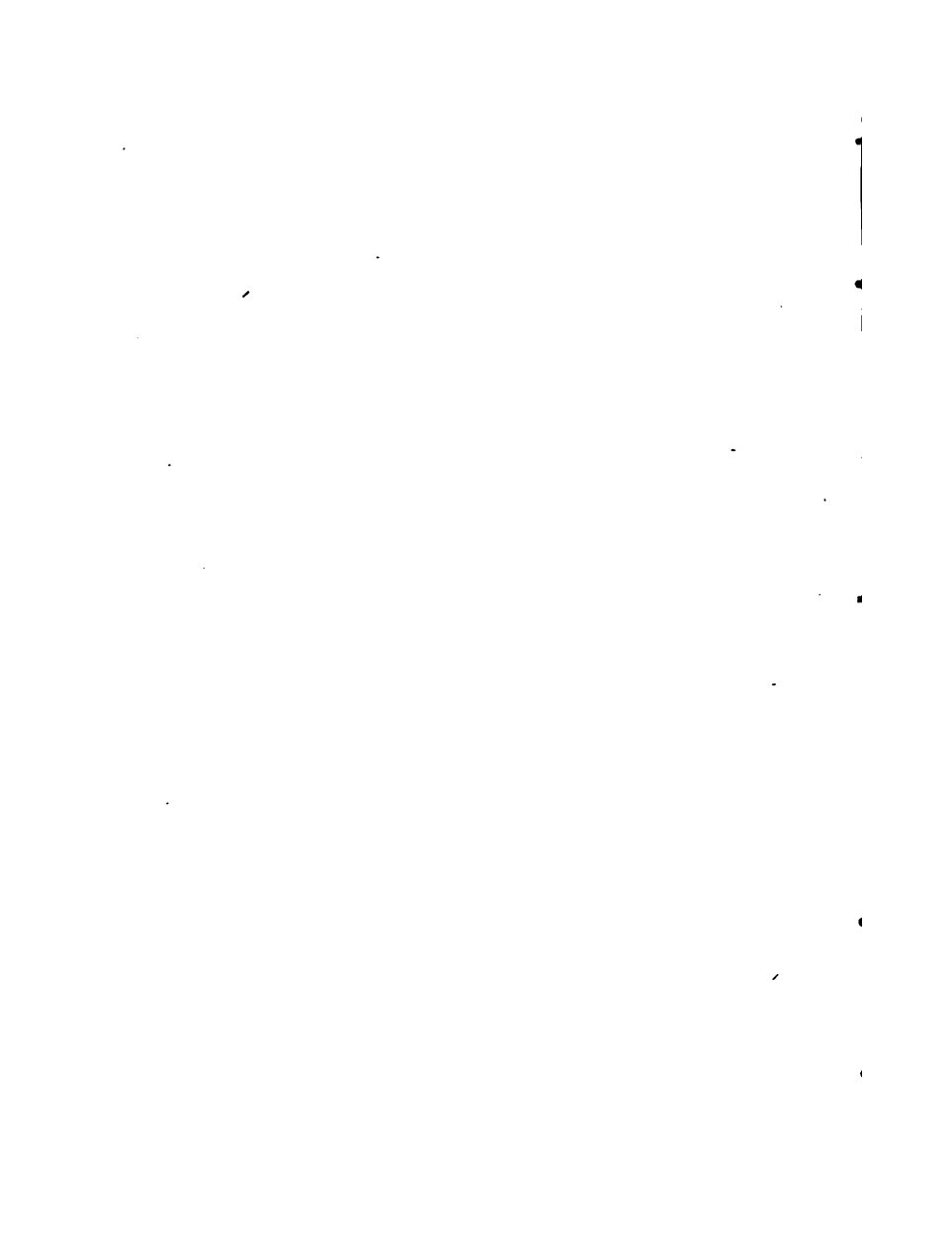


LONDON:

T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW;  
EDINBURGH; AND NEW YORK.

1875.

189. 9. 173



## Contents.



|                                         |     |
|-----------------------------------------|-----|
| I. INTRODUCTORY, ... ..                 | 7   |
| II. THE FOREST, ... ..                  | 12  |
| III. THE COLLARED SUN-BIRD, ... ..      | 21  |
| IV. AFRICAN SUN-BIRDS, ... ..           | 26  |
| V. THE SPLENDID SUN-BIRD, ... ..        | 32  |
| VI. THE NAMAQUA SUN-BIRD, ... ..        | 38  |
| VII. THE MALACHITE SUN-BIRD, ... ..     | 44  |
| VIII. SUN-BIRDS IN JAVA, ... ..         | 49  |
| IX. SUN-BIRD IN SUMATRA, ... ..         | 56  |
| X. THE FIERY-TAILED SUN-BIRD, ... ..    | 60  |
| XI. THE NEPAUL SUN-BIRD, ... ..         | 65  |
| XII. THE CEYLON SUN-BIRD, ... ..        | 70  |
| XIII. THE PARADISE FLY-CATCHER, .. ..   | 74  |
| XIV. THE KING-BIRD, ... ..              | 80  |
| XV. THE STRANGE EGG IN THE NEST, ... .. | 88  |
| XVI. THE BLUE-HEADED TANAGER, .. ..     | 94  |
| XVII. THE SUMMER RED BIRD, ... ..       | 101 |





# THE SUN-BIRDS.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.



THE Sun-Birds have been called by old writers the Humming-Birds of Africa.

Africa is the home of a vast variety of these beautiful birds. They are distinguished from each other by many marks and signs, pointing out the different species. But in all instances the plumage is brilliant, and the under surface of the body is adorned with bands or stripes of colour.



The name of the family is *Nectarinidæ*, and has been given them from their habit of sipping the nectar of flowers ; indeed, they were once supposed to live entirely on honey. But this is not the case, since insects form part of their diet.

The other title, of “Sun-Bird,” has been given to this radiant little creature because of the wonderful effect of the sunlight on its feathers.

They change colour every moment, and flash and sparkle in a manner not to be described. This effect is produced by the bird itself. It has the power of changing the position of its feathers by a movement of its muscles, and so throwing them into a different light, or exhibiting a portion of the surface hitherto concealed.

The Sun-Bird does not feed on the wing, or hover over the flower, as the Humming-Bird does. It settles on the

petals, and puts in its long bill ; or it clambers about and suspends itself in the attitude most favourable for getting access to the flower. The bill has some tiny notches or teeth, so small that they cannot be seen except through a microscope. This shows that the prey has to be seized and held, and that the bird does not feed entirely on honey. It is true that the long beak is plunged into the chalice of the flower, as into a goblet of honey ; but the bird picks out the insects found therein, and banquets on them, as well as on the juices of the flower. Sometimes, indeed, the Sun-Bird is seen clambering about the leaves and branches of the dwarf trees and the brushwood. There no honey can be found, and the sole object of the search is for insects.

As the bird passes from flower to flower, it utters a shrill, impatient cry. But

when it is warbling to its mate, its note will be sweet and pleasant. But it is so low, that unless you stood under the tree where the bird was perching, you could not hear its song.

The Sun-Bird makes her nest of the down of plants mixed with a few dead leaves, and the outside wall is all of moss. It looks, when it is finished, like a little ball, rather pointed at the bottom; and the bird makes a cover for it, like a hood, that hides the hole where she enters, and prevents it being seen.

Sometimes she will build her nest in the hollow of a tree, or else suspend it to a twig, and let it hang in the air, as the Tailor-Bird does.

And—what you will think very strange—she has even been known to fix it to a spider's web! The spiders that live in hot countries are very large and strong,

and their webs are more like gauze than cobwebs. So the tiny nest of the Sun-Bird, as light as a feather, may very well be fixed to one of them without breaking the threads.

Nothing can be more gaudy than these brilliant little creatures, that sport about with the gaily-dressed birds of the Tropics. And, like most other birds, they put on their best attire at that season of the year when they choose their partners, and begin to think of building their nests. Then their brightest tints are worn, and they are ornamented with tufts and crests that afterwards disappear. Indeed, on this occasion they are said to wear "their wedding-dress!"





## CHAPTER II.

### THE FOREST.



If you live in the country, I dare say you often go into the woods. And very pleasant it is there. You may find the blue-bell and the white anemone ; and you may see the little squirrel sitting on the branches of the trees, or else leaping from bough to bough. You may think there are no woods so deep and shady as these. The grassy paths may seem like labyrinths ; and the stillness so profound, you may fancy, as the poet did, that the spirits of the wood wait and hold their peace while you pass by.

But in hot countries the woods are not like our woods. They are great dark forests, where the trees grow so thickly together, and are so tall, that if you looked up you could hardly see the sky. Then, there are a great many climbing-plants, that twist themselves round and round the trunks and branches of the trees. They are called vegetable cables, because they are so much like ropes, and they reach from one tree to another, and almost fill up the spaces between. The white man has to fight his way with his hatchet, or else burn himself a passage.

Dangers of every kind lurk in the forest. The quick subtle Indian will not venture without his poisoned arrow, or the white man without the thunder and lightning of his gun. The venomous snake may lie coiled among the bushes, or traces of the savage jaguar be seen upon the path.

Birds, animals, and insects live undisturbed. It is their home; and on every side they are at work, hunting their prey, or escaping from danger. Man is not there to wage war upon them; but these wild creatures of the forest wage war upon each other, and the weak are always using some contrivance to protect themselves from the strong.

There are a great many curious things to be seen in the forest.

In the deepest gloom, where the trees shut out the sun, myriads of lights flit about, and twinkle like little stars. They flash here and there, and you might fancy that troops of fairies were carrying torches in their hands; but there are no fairies in the case,—the lights are only the torches of the fire-flies that live in the recesses of the wood, and every night make a kind of illumination amongst the trees.

Then there are troops of monkeys, that run along the vegetable cables from tree to tree, or swing from the branches by their tails, making a noise all the time as if they were talking to each other. When night comes they roll themselves into a ball, all huddled together as close as may be, to keep themselves warm. Sometimes it happens that a few little monkeys have not been alert enough to get into the ball, and are left shivering outside. They keep up a pitiful howling the whole night through, telling the rest how cold and miserable they are, and begging to be let in. But the others are very hard-hearted; they pay no attention, and go quietly off to sleep.

In Tropical America vast rivers run through the forest, and numberless streams and creeks wind along, twisting and doubling in every direction. On the bank



is a complete wall of forest, that presents a firm, dense barrier. Now and then a sad story has reached us of travellers lost in the forest, and who have tried to make their way by the side of the stream. But the thick brushwood or jungle, that grows close to the water's edge, has stopped their progress, and made it impossible to push on further.

Even the fierce jaguar, the tiger of the forest, often loses himself in the tangled maze. He cannot force his way, supple as he is, through the labyrinth. He is obliged to climb a tree, and travel for miles along the branches, passing from one tree to another, and running up and down the vegetable ropes and ladders with the adroitness of a monkey.

While he remains in this leafy home, the poor monkeys form his chief supply of food. They flee before him with shrill

screams, and use all their nimbleness to get out of his way.

The wall of forest presents a wonderful spectacle. Often it is gloomy and dark, and the trees are of a uniform colour. But here and there a mighty tree has pushed its way up through the mass, as if resolved to get more light and air. Its splendid crown of flowers, red, white, or yellow, towers aloft.

Here are the palms in full magnificence—crowned in the season with beauty. And, now and then, the scene is like fairy-land.

Brilliant blossoms of white and scarlet overhang the water, and flowering creepers hang around the trees, and droop from the branches like festoons. Here, in the more open spots where the wall of forest recedes, are found the most beautiful birds.

Flocks of Parrots glisten in the sun,

clad in glowing scarlet, or green, or gold. Humming-Birds, like gems of beauty, come to seek honey and insects from the forest flowers. Fly-catchers gleam and sparkle. Water-fowl of snowy plumage sport on the streams, and their white dresses contrast with those of the red Flamingo and the scarlet Ibis, that stand patiently fishing on the shore.

Here and there a black object appears on the water, that looks like a log of wood floating slowly down. But it is nothing of the kind. It is the fierce alligator watching for his prey. And here, too, fringing many an islet in the river, is seen the wonderful mangrove, a tree that can grow on the shores of the ocean, with its roots bathed by the salt waves.

A belt of mangroves fringing the river-bank will push itself further and further, until a portion of land will actually be

reclaimed and wrested, as it were, from the water.

The mangrove has a curious way of lifting itself out of the ground or swamp. Its roots form a number of arches, which rise up to some height and spread themselves far and wide. From the midst of the arches springs the stem, clothed with branches and gay with flowers.

Among the arches, and in the damp black mud out of which they spring, millions of insects, and crabs, and other creatures sport in safety.

Man cannot approach them, for the air is fatal to him, though harmless to them.

There is a special provision made by Nature for the mangrove. The seed drops, at the proper season, and is in danger of being carried away, by the stream, from the muddy bank on which alone it could grow. But it is possessed

of rootlets, by which it can attach itself at once to the swampy ground, and remain there in security. These rootlets are put forth, and the stem gradually rises up from the midst, and another mangrove is added to the great belt of trees that lines the bank.

At times the mighty river becomes swollen by the rains. Then, huge waves rise and march rapidly onward. It overflows its banks, and rushes through the forest with a terrible roar and crash.

The forest trees, gigantic as they are, become uprooted, and are carried away by the stream as though they were reeds or rushes. The monkeys, the jaguars, all the creatures of the forest are swept away. And the gloomy alligator swims where lately they made their home in the branches.



### CHAPTER III.

#### THE COLLARED SUN-BIRD.



THE Collared Sun-Bird is one of the most lovely specimens of its race. It lives near the Cape of Good Hope. Very little is known of its habits; but it is supposed to build in the hollows of trees, or, where the country is more open, in some bush or shrub.

It is a creature of exquisite beauty. The golden-green of its plumage changes every moment you behold it. Under the green of the breast is a band of steel-blue, and then a band of glowing crimson. On either side of the crimson band or stripe is

a tuft of bright yellow feathers. The wings are glossed with green, and the upper feathers of the tail are violet. You can scarcely imagine the effect produced by a number of these gorgeous birds, as they sit perched on the petals of some brilliant spike of flowers, or as they glitter and sparkle in the sun. There is a relation of the Collared Sun-Bird that is, if possible, more magnificent. It is called the Double-collared Sun-Bird, and is much larger than the bird we have been describing. It has the same arrangement of colours, but the blue band is of a deeper tint, and the crimson stripe is broader. It lives in Africa, and chooses the forests that clothe the eastern side of the continent. Now and then, it descends into the plains; but it makes its nest in the hollow of some forest tree; and the mother-bird lays four or five eggs.

There is still another Collared Sun-Bird, a dried specimen of which has been brought to England. It is so much like the one found at the Cape of Good Hope, that for a long time the two were thought to be the same.

The only difference between them is, that in the bird of which I am speaking the wings and tail are smaller, and the beautiful collar of blue is wanting. The upper feathers of the tail are of the same brilliant green as the head and back, instead of being violet. This beautiful bird is found in Africa, near the river Niger.

Nothing can exceed the grandeur of the African trees. Some of them are of a gigantic size, and have existed for ages.

One of these trees, vast as it is, belongs to the same family as the mallow and the hollyhock, and has the same mild juices.

The African gathers the leaves, and



when he has dried and pounded them, mixes the powder with his food. He also makes a strong cordage of the fibres of the bark.

The baobab, or monkey-bread tree, as it is called, will often be stripped of its bark to a considerable distance up the stem. But this seems not to harm the tree; it merely causes it to throw out a new bark.

As the baobab begins to decay, the hollow space in the trunk fills with water; which, being protected from the sun, keeps cool and fresh for a long time.

The natives come to this supply as to a fountain. They sometimes bring buckets made of leather, and, climbing the tree, let down a bucket and draw as much as they require.

This is not the only use made of the baobab. In some of the African villages,

the hollow trunk of the giant tree has a doorway rudely cut into it; and is thus made into a vast room, in which the chiefs and principal people of the tribe can meet to discuss matters of business.

The baobab, vast as it is in circumference, does not grow to any great height. It seldom grows higher than sixty feet. It bears a quantity of fruit. The fruit hangs from a long stalk, and is the size and shape of a cucumber.

The monkeys love the fruit, and devour it greedily. This is why the tree has been called the monkey-bread tree.





## CHAPTER IV.

### AFRICAN SUN-BIRDS.



THE Cape of Good Hope and the southern parts of Africa are the favourite abode of many gem-like birds that adorn the groves and gardens.

Here they find every sweet they can desire. The rare plants seen in our hot-houses, and the rich exotic flowers that we admire so much, have most of them been brought from Africa.

Turn where we will, in those favoured spots some flower or blossom meets our gaze.

Here are all the families of lilies, painted with the gayest colours, and countless as the sand upon the sea-shore.

Mingling with them is the grotesque orchis, with its bee or bird-like flower, and which covers the meadows, and reaches even to the foot of the mountains. Geraniums of every size and colour grow like weeds, and roses are in the same profusion.

Many of the plants and shrubs yield a sweet and sugary juice. The very gum of the branches is sweet, and in some species can be used as sugar-candy. The natives break it off and eat it.

The Sun-Bird is very fond of a tree called by the natives the sugar-tree, because at the bottom of the flowers it is sure to find a quantity of sugary juice. People gather the flowers of the sugar-tree, and boil down the juice, and use it, as we do sugar, for preserving fruit.

Numbers of little Sun-Birds are always to be seen perched upon the flowers, sipping honey, or making havoc among the insects which, like themselves, are fond of sugar.

And in less fertile spots—even in the waste places with which Africa abounds—many curious plants contrive to exist. One of these plants has great fleshy stems, and flowers that look a little like a star-fish. The smell of the flowers is by no means fragrant. It resembles the odour of decaying meat ; and on that account the flower is called “the carrion-flower.”

Here, too, growing everywhere, is the fig-marigold, with its bright-coloured petals, and its roots that can not only hold fast to the shifting sand, but draw nourishment from it.

But amid the profusion of flowers, none are more numerous than the heaths. Like

the marigolds, they grow everywhere, and they will clothe the barest and most barren rock with beauty.

The flowers of the heath vary in shape as they do in colour. They are cup-shaped, or bell-shaped, or trumpet-shaped ; and they are red, and green, and yellow, and purple—every tint, in fact, but blue.

Round the larger flowers are usually swarms of birds and insects. Here are butterflies richly clad, buzzing hosts of bees, and, more beautiful than all, the tiny Sun-Bird, scarcely larger than the butterfly, and which comes to perch on the edge of some velvet petal.

There is a little Sun-Bird, with blue bands glossed with violet, called the Blue-banded Sun-Bird, and which flies in small flocks of eight or ten together. And there is another, the Violet-banded Sun-Bird, still more tiny. And another still, with

tufts on either side of brilliant scarlet. Then there is another, called the Fine-backed Sun-Bird. Its head and neck are of a glowing purple, with a bronze-like lustre. The upper parts of the bird are coloured like the petals of the auricula, with a constantly changing lustre. There are no tufts, but on each wing is a patch of the richest violet.

Another beautiful bird has a patch of emerald-green upon its throat; and the fore-parts of the neck and breast are of the brightest scarlet, changing into purple.

This gay plumage disappears when the mating season is over, and the bird becomes of a dull brown, tinted with yellow.

Then there is the Amethyst-throated Sun-Bird, the plumage of which is thick and soft as velvet. On the throat is an oval patch of rich purple, and the wing-  
feathers are of the same beautiful tint. It

is one of the largest species of the Sun-Birds; and though the velvety feathers are darker than usual, yet the patches of colour make it equal in beauty to any of its tribe.

I might mention, too, the Red-breasted Sun-Bird, a wonderful little creature, with a collar of red and yellow, and the head and neck of a golden-green. And the Long-tailed Sun-Bird, with a collar of blue; and which is found in Nubia, nestling among the leaves of the acacia-trees.

But the descriptions I could give you, or even pictures themselves, would fail to impart any adequate idea of these gems of Nature—these beautiful birds!







## CHAPTER V.

### THE SPLENDID SUN-BIRD.

HE mighty forests of Eastern Africa are nourished and fed by an annual supply of rain. And streams and rivers water the earth. But other parts of the continent are not so favoured. There are tracts of country which suffer from long-continued droughts, and at certain times are barren and waste. The soil is a kind of loose sand, almost like the desert. And yet these tracts of country cannot be called deserts. In spite of the want of rain, and the sandy soil, they will often be covered

with plants and shrubs, and grass will clothe the ground, and here and there trees will grow.

Nature has provided a number of plants suited to these arid spots, and able to draw nourishment and to subsist where other plants would die. And not only so, but the plants and shrubs found in these parched places can afford a sort of refreshment and comfort to man. The thirsty traveller, making his way over the plain, often comes on a little plant with a stem no thicker than a quill. If he is aware of the nature of the plant, he will rejoice as though he had found a benefactor. He will dig round it, and will presently unearth the root, which is a large round tuber, the size of an infant's head. When he takes off the rind of the tuber, there is a quantity of juicy pulp within, which is cool and refreshing, and suffices to allay his thirst.

There is another creeping plant allied to this, and which bears many tubers, some of them as large as a man's head.

The tubers grow in a circle a little distance from the stem. The natives are very quick at finding out the exact spot where the tuber lies hidden. They strike the ground with a stone, and listen to the sound it makes. Their ears are so sharp they can detect the slightest difference in the sound of the blow. When the tuber is just beneath, the noise of the blow is not the same. And then, in that exact spot, the native begins to dig, and soon finds the treasure he is seeking. Each tuber affords a grateful supply of nourishment and of moisture.

Another refreshing plant of the desert is the water-melon. Now and then an unusual quantity of rain will fall and gladden the parched soil. Then the

water-melons push forth in abundance, and literally stud the ground. The traveller and his party, and his cattle, may live upon them many days, and care little about any other kind of beverage.

I might mention many more of these water-yielding plants. On the western coast, on the banks of a river that is very often dried up and empty, the hillocks of sand are enriched by a bountiful gourd that grows upon them. It is about the size of a turnip, and has an orange-coloured pulp, the taste of which is very agreeable. One part of the year the gourd, or *naras*, as it is called, serves as the staple food of the natives. It contains a number of seeds, a little like almonds, and they dry them in the sun and put them by as a reserve. When the fruit fails, they fall back on the seeds, and are preserved from famine.

This tract of country could not be inhabited but for the naras. Food is scarcely to be obtained, and the natives would perish if they were deprived of this wholesome and agreeable resource.

But there is still another tribe of plants which must not be passed over.

To this tribe belongs the fig-marigold, which is also called the Hottentot's fig.

One of the marigolds has a tuberous root, which is eaten raw; and from the leaves of another the Hottentots prepare a substance which they chew like tobacco.

In the western part of Africa is found one of the most beautiful of the Sun-Birds. It is called the Splendid Sun-Bird; and no more suitable name could be given to it. Its neck is of a golden-green, and varies in colour with every changing light. Its head and throat sometimes look black, and sometimes of a

rich violet. It has a band of scarlet across its breast, and its tail is jet black, edged with golden-green.

And the tints of this wonderful bird do so change with every light, that the breast looks as if it were banded with blue, and green, and violet. The reason of this play of colours is owing to the structure of the feathers. Each feather has a tip of vermilion, so fine that it is lost against the tint of the feather beneath, and only comes now and then to sight. The base of the feather is a metallic blue or green.

Two lemon-coloured tufts spring from each side of the breast. This gorgeous bird, thus sumptuously arrayed, visits the Great Fish River and the country round, inhabited by savage tribes. Its favourite resort is the worm-eaten trunks of the mimosa-trees, where it makes its nest.



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE NAMAQUA SUN-BIRD.



ANY wild tribes live scattered about on the plains of Africa, obtaining a livelihood from the animals or the plants, or even the insects and the reptiles that abound.

There is the Bushman, who inhabits the most desolate spots, and is so degraded as to be hardly human. He lives by hunting, and follows his prey from place to place.

But he is neither strong nor brave, so that he has recourse to cunning. He uses a poisoned arrow, and is very adroit in aiming it. The poison is so powerful

that the animal dies almost at once. Then the Bushman takes out the poisoned part, and generally devours the prey before he quits the spot.

There are some animals whose skin resists the poison, such as the elephant. Then the Bushman makes a pitfall, and covers it with twigs and leaves. Or he goes out some moonlight night armed with his spear, that has a long blade attached to it. One wound alone would have little effect on the elephant, and he could march off with the spear in his body. But the Bushman gives him no rest. He returns to the attack again and again, choosing the moment when the elephant is out of breath, and has just made a furious charge. By degrees, the huge animal gets weak from loss of blood, and falls a victim to the perseverance of his enemy.



Nothing in the way of food comes amiss to the Bushman. He searches out the nest of the ostrich, and takes the eggs.

When this is done, he hides himself, and waits patiently until the monstrous bird comes home. He shoots it with one of his deadly arrows—arrows that make such havoc with the wild creatures of the plain.

But the Bushman cannot always procure sufficient food, even though he will devour snakes, ants, and locusts.

The women go about collecting roots and melons, and all the fruits they can find, to eke out a scanty living.

The Bushman has a neighbour far more provident than himself. He has just the same difficulties to contend with, for he cannot always procure food; and if it comes a dry season, the melons and

gourds will fail him. But he cultivates a little garden of his own, and grows herbs and vegetables for his use. And he has a flock of goats, which he contrives to keep alive in spite of the occasional want of water.

Water is as scarce as possible during the long droughts; and the Bechuana, as he is called, dare not let his well be seen. His fierce neighbours would come and rob him of the precious store; so he is obliged to act with the utmost caution.

He keeps the well covered over with sand, so that no one can find it; and he lives a long way off. When he is obliged to send for water, a number of women set off and journey to the place. They have bags filled with egg-shells of the ostrich, which are the only water-vessels they use. They do not open the well, but each woman inserts a reed into it, plunging it

as deep as it will go. Then she draws up the water with her mouth, and puts it out into the egg-shell by her side, filling shell after shell until she has enough.

The water thus slowly procured is carried home, and every drop is as precious as gold.

Among the wild tribes scattered over this part of Africa a beautiful Sun-Bird is found.

It inhabits the country of the Namaquas, and is called the Namaqua Sun-Bird.

It has been seen nowhere else, and remains in this one locality all the year round.

The plumage it wears is grave compared with many of its family ; but a tuft of vivid orange springs from either side of the breast, and gives it a beautiful appearance.

The young birds are of a reddish-brown ; but some of them have two pale yellow spots, one on either side. From these spots by-and-by will spring the tufts of orange that are so great an ornament.

You must not suppose that the Namaquas are so degraded a race as the Bushmen. They have herds of cattle, and are far more civilized ; but, like the rest of the African tribes, they are very cunning, and not at all to be trusted.





## CHAPTER VII.

### THE MALACHITE SUN-BIRD.

**T**HE Malachite Sun-Bird is the largest of the whole species, and differs a little from its relations. Two of the tail-feathers are of some length, reaching beyond the others three or more inches.

All the upper parts of the body of this beautiful bird are of a deep green, like malachite, with a changing tint of gold and bronze. The feathers on the head and throat are thick and close, like a pile of velvet, and a little resemble the plumage of the Birds of Paradise. On the

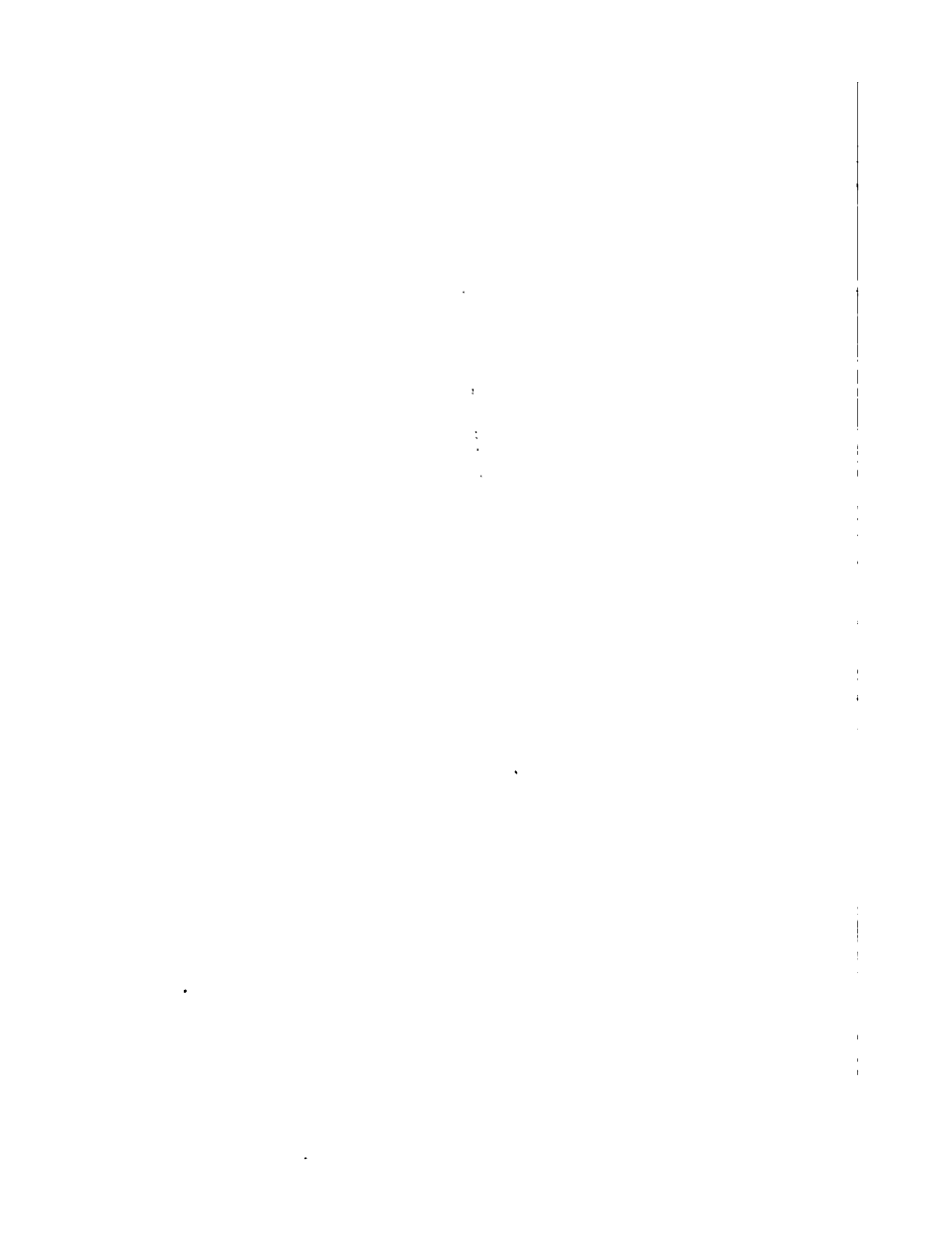






MALACCA PARAKEET & GOULD'S SUN BIRD





breast and neck the colours seem as if waved, the tip of the feathers being green, and the base a deep black. The wings of this splendid bird are black, edged with the same malachite-green, and from the under part are two tufts of brilliant yellow.

It would be scarcely possible to describe the varied tints and hues and changing colours that play every moment over the surface of the plumage. But, after the period of rearing its young has passed, the beautiful Sun-Bird changes its costume. Its radiant tints vanish, and it becomes of a dull green and yellow. Thus it remains, divested of its charms, until the next season arrives. Then the long tail-feathers appear, and the plumage assumes its brilliancy. It again flashes and sparkles, and delights the eye with its wonderful beauty.

The home of the Malachite Sun-Bird is

in the southern part of Africa, near the Cape of Good Hope.

Here, in the gardens occupied by the colonists, and in pleasant fertile spots, grow the flowers in which the Sun-Birds delight.

All kinds of acacia-trees bloom in full beauty. Here is the delicate sensitive-plant that shrinks at a touch; and the tamarind-tree with its graceful foliage and yellow sweet-smelling flowers, and which has stored up, in its pods, a soft acid pulp pleasant to the taste.

And growing nearer to the interior of the continent, further north than the colony, is the curious butter-tree, so much prized by the natives.

It grows in the thickest part of the forest, and is tall and straight, with a bark that resembles the ash. The branches spring from the tree at a great height;

and when the nuts are ripe they are gathered by the black man as one of his richest treasures.

He prepares them by boiling until the oil or butter is expressed ; and in this state it is perfectly white, like our English butter when newly churned. The native uses it in his cookery as we do butter. And he has another object in preparing it, and quite as important. His toilette could not be made without it. He anoints his skin with the product of the "fat-tree," as he calls it, to prevent the cracks or scabs which are apt to spoil his personal appearance.

Indeed, the fat-tree is so precious to him, that if any dearth of the nuts takes place, it is as bad as a famine.

Yet, like the rest of the uncivilized world, he will not be at the pains to cultivate it.

as deep as it will go. Then she draws up the water with her mouth, and puts it out into the egg-shell by her side, filling shell after shell until she has enough.

The water thus slowly procured is carried home, and every drop is as precious as gold.

Among the wild tribes scattered over this part of Africa a beautiful Sun-Bird is found.

It inhabits the country of the Namaquas, and is called the Namaqua Sun-Bird.

It has been seen nowhere else, and remains in this one locality all the year round.

The plumage it wears is grave compared with many of its family; but a tuft of vivid orange springs from either side of the breast, and gives it a beautiful appearance.

The young birds are of a reddish-brown ; but some of them have two pale yellow spots, one on either side. From these spots by-and-by will spring the tufts of orange that are so great an ornament.

You must not suppose that the Namaquas are so degraded a race as the Bushmen. They have herds of cattle, and are far more civilized ; but, like the rest of the African tribes, they are very cunning, and not at all to be trusted.



as deep as it will go. Then she draws up the water with her mouth, and puts it out into the egg-shell by her side, filling shell after shell until she has enough.

The water thus slowly procured is carried home, and every drop is as precious as gold.

Among the wild tribes scattered over this part of Africa a beautiful Sun-Bird is found.

It inhabits the country of the Namaquas, and is called the Namaqua Sun-Bird.

It has been seen nowhere else, and remains in this one locality all the year round.

The plumage it wears is grave compared with many of its family; but a tuft of vivid orange springs from either side of the breast, and gives it a beautiful appearance.

The young birds are of a reddish-brown ; but some of them have two pale yellow spots, one on either side. From these spots by-and-by will spring the tufts of orange that are so great an ornament.

You must not suppose that the Namaquas are so degraded a race as the Bushmen. They have herds of cattle, and are far more civilized ; but, like the rest of the African tribes, they are very cunning, and not at all to be trusted.





lurk only a few yards distant, hidden by some patch of jungle, and be ready to take his fatal spring.

He is a handsome creature with stripes of black and gold, and every movement is full of grace. But he is the scourge of this beautiful island; and scarce a native family, in these tiger-haunted places, but has had some member of it carried away and devoured.

Java abounds in all the riches of the tropical world: birds and insects wear the splendid colours that belong to the land of perpetual summer.

The insects attain a size beyond what is ever known in England. There are gigantic spiders, that spin a network so strong that it has to be cut with a knife.

On one of these powerful threads the spider suspends itself, as in mid-air, across the forest glade, and seems mounted on

some aërial bridge. The birds might seize on the tempting morsel displayed thus openly before them. But Nature has protected the spider by giving it a number of sharp spines that stick out of its body. Some of these spines are longer than the body of the spider itself, and render it an unpleasant morsel for a bird to swallow.

In England, the spider wears a very sombre dress; but in the Tropics it is far otherwise. The spider is arrayed in as rich a costume as the Sun-Bird or the Humming-Bird!

It has stripes of yellow, black, orange, and green; and marks and characters of the most grotesque description are painted on its body.

These brilliantly-marked spiders live among the flowers and foliage. Those of the species that lurk in gloomy places,

wear a dark and sombre attire, as if in unison with their habits.

One spider, with a black body and scarlet sides, lives on the seeds of a tree which are marked in exactly the same manner as itself.

The spiders have many enemies; for they are not all protected by spines. In Java there is a kind of sparrow that lives almost entirely on spiders, and is named from this very habit. The bird has a long slender bill curved backwards; and it can search for the spider, and drag it from the most secure hiding-place.

There is a curious sight often met with in Java.

The traveller who approaches a village may happen to see a tree covered with black objects, which he supposes to be the fruit.

The objects, however, turn out to be

nothing of the kind. He soon perceives a disagreeable scent, and hears a piping noise. The black objects resolve themselves into a troop of bats !

There they hang, head downwards, from the branches to which they have hooked themselves, waiting for the dusk of evening, when they will fly forth in search of prey.

The largest bat in the world lives in Java.





## CHAPTER IX.

### SUN-BIRD IN SUMATRA.



SOME fifteen miles from Java lies the great island of Sumatra. Here we are close under the Equator, for the imaginary line runs obliquely through the island. A beautiful Sun-Bird flits about, under the fierce rays of the vertical sun, and makes its home here. It has a blue patch on the forehead, and a stripe of the same colour on the sides of the neck. The upper part of the back is a dark red, and the breast is also red, but of a lighter shade. The tail feathers are blue.

This bird, which is one of the tiny gems in the family of Sun-Birds, was mentioned by Sir Stamford Raffles, in a list he made of the birds of Java and Sumatra. He was once governor of these islands, and to him we are indebted for many discoveries in natural history.

It was he who first came upon the monstrous flower called after himself "the Rafflesia," and which was growing unknown and unheard of in the forests of Sumatra.

It belongs to a class of plants much akin to the *fungi*, and is a parasite in its habits. It has neither root nor leaves; but the flower, huge as it is, and the largest flower in the world, issues from the root or stem of a tree, and gradually opens its flesh-like petals. The odour it gives out is anything but agreeable, and resembles decaying meat.

Here, too, is the curious leaf-like butterfly that so deceives the naturalist. He sees it flying about with its bright colours, and a band of deep orange across its wings. Then, all at once, it is gone, and seems as if it had vanished by magic. He searches for it in vain ; and though he can point out the exact spot where he saw it last, he cannot find it. But all the time it is close by him, and he has looked at it again and again without recognizing it.

It has settled on a twig, with its wings closed, and looks so much like a leaf that he has mistaken it for one. The reason of this great resemblance is soon explained. The upper wings of the butterfly end in a fine point like the tip of a leaf, and the lower wings end in a projection very much like a stalk ; and, besides that, there is a stripe up the wing that looks exactly like

the midrib of the leaf, and there are other markings that correspond with the veins.

The butterfly drops down upon a twig, and is thus lost sight of ; and this is the way it escapes many of its enemies.

The Sun-Bird which lives in Sumatra was named after Mrs. Gould, the wife of Mr. Gould the naturalist. It wears a costume of blue, yellow, and red, and has light-brown wings which are always in motion. As it flutters in the sunlight, it seems some fairy creature decked in gold and azure and all the tints of the rainbow.







## CHAPTER X.

### THE FIERY-TAILED SUN-BIRD.



HERE is a country that, in olden time, was looked upon as a kind of magic region.

The travellers who made their way thither, brought home wonderful accounts of the products of the place. But gradually the fairy region became more trodden and better known. In these days, every part of India is familiar.

It reaches from the ranges of the Himalaya Mountains to the point of Cape Comorin ; and though the fables once believed have passed away, it is well known

to abound in the rarest and the richest productions.

India is the home of almost every beautiful bird, insect, and flower that exists within the range of the Tropics ; and the scenery in many parts may well be compared to fairy-land.

Here grow the trees and plants which are of such service to man, and the products of which are borne in merchant-vessels to every part of the globe. The cotton, the rice, the arrow-root, the indigo, all kinds of dyes, and spices, and fabrics of the finest texture, almost as fine as gossamer, come from India. And here are pearls, and ivory, and gold, and gems—indeed, the riches of the world seem poured out in this favoured land.

The fertility of India is occasioned by the plentiful supply of moisture yielded to it. The mountain ranges, which look

down on the plains of India, have their summits covered with snow. The melting of the snow forms the source of numberless streams, and of the great rivers that gladden the land. Thus supplied with heat and moisture, herbs, trees, and flowers flourish with the utmost luxuriance.

Beautiful birds surround us on every hand. Each fairy bower and forest glade abounds with them.

When the morning sun shines on the crown of the palm-trees, a cloud of Parrots, like streaks or patches of vivid colour, fly forth in search of a stream in which to take their early bath. Humming-Birds of radiant hues sparkle among the branches, and gorgeous Fly-Catchers pursue the insects that flutter on every side.

Here we find the Sun-Birds like tiny gnomes perching on the flowers, or climbing

among the branches. One of them, the Fiery-tailed, or, as he is sometimes called, the Red-tailed Sun-Bird, is a native of a part of India called Silhet, a province which borders on Bengal, and has a capital town of the same name.

He is clad in a glowing costume. The upper part of the head and the throat are blue, changing into violet. Then comes a patch, or mark, of orange scarlet. The wings are purple, edged with green, while the breast is yellow.

The fiery tail is of the same orange scarlet ; and two of the tail feathers reach to a considerable distance.

Amid the wealth of flowers, and under the burning sun in which he delights, the Sun-Bird enjoys his little day. The trees of the forest are crowned with fragrant flowers, on which he loves to perch ; or he visits the gardens, rich with tropical

beauty. His tiny nest is composed of the finest down, picked, perhaps, from the cotton tree, and mixed with dead leaves.

A resident in India watched the little Sun-Birds build their nest.

They began by fixing some materials to the great web of a spider, that hung from a twig. The materials consisted of fragments of paper, threads of cloth, grass, and other substances ; and when the nest was finished, it hung suspended from the web, like a little ball in the air.





## CHAPTER XI.

### THE NEPAUL SUN-BIRD.



HERE is in India an extensive plain enclosed between ranges of mountains, and called the territory of Nepaul. It resembles a kind of amphitheatre, covered with towns and villages. It is so surrounded by hills and mountains, that it cannot be entered or quitted without passing by one or other of them.

The northern part of the territory enjoys a temperate climate, such as Europe: for snow lies upon the tops of the mountains, and will even sprinkle the valleys;

hoar-frost will be known and heard of in these localities ; but the rivers are never frozen, nor is there any great severity of climate.

For some distance up the mountain-sides, you find yourself in all the rich vegetation of the Tropics. Nay, in the deep sheltered valleys, which wind into the heart of the mountains, the same brilliant flora prevails. Here are palms and acacias, here are trees clothed with the grotesque orchis, and here are the feathery tufts of the bamboo.

Higher still, are oaks and forest trees of a more northern growth, and even the pine.

The musk-deer is a source of wealth to the inhabitants of Nepaul. They hunt it for the sake of the musk that it secretes, and that is so much prized as a perfume.

The deer leads a solitary life, in the

wild rocky places on the borders of the snow. It has no horns or antlers, and differs in other respects from the stag or the antelope.

In winter it comes down to more temperate spots; and this is the only time when the hunter has a chance of capturing it. Even then his task is a very difficult one. He sets a snare, or else goes out with his bow and arrow. But the creature is so shy, that he is often obliged to imitate the cry of the young one, in order to induce the old deer to approach within reach of his arrows.

The difficulty of obtaining the musk causes it to be sold at a very high price; and hunting the deer would be a profitable employment, were they more easy to capture.

The musk is sent to England, and comes in little bags or sacks. It is well known



in the toilette, and to many people the scent is agreeable.

It is also used as a medicine.

In the forests that clothe the mountains of Nepaul is found a lovely Sun-Bird.

Its bill and legs are of a wood-brown ; the top of the head a golden-green, changing into purple ; and the neck and back a deep carmine-red. The cheeks, throat, and breast of this beautiful bird are of a dazzling scarlet. The lower part of the body has a band or mark of pale yellow ; but when the bird is at rest, the long feathers of the tail conceal this yellow band.

This exquisite little gem is by no means rare in the dense forests of which we have spoken. It finds in the thick foliage an abundance of spiders, ants, and other insects, on which it feeds, and is seen flitting among the deep recesses like a sun-beam.

There is another beautiful bird in this locality, called the Nepaul Sun-Bird. The head, throat, and neck are blue, and there is a crescent-shaped band of chestnut on the breast. The under parts of the body are yellow, and the middle of the breast is of bright orange.

I might tell you of still another Sun-Bird found here ; but only one specimen has reached us, and that had been greatly injured. On the sides of the neck are two stripes, or, as they are called, moustaches, of a rich blue, changing into violet and pink. The tail feathers are of the same rich colours ; and they are broad at the base, and loose from each other, so that the bird can spread them out like a fan. The under part of the body is black.





## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CEYLON SUN-BIRD.



**A**MONG the lovely groves and gardens of Ceylon sports a dainty little Sun-Bird.

It is dressed in the gay attire of the beautiful birds. Its throat is a rich purple mixed with black, and the body is a glowing yellow; while the band across the throat, and the tail feathers, are a deep brown.

Nothing can exceed the beauty of this tiny gem, as it perches itself on the petal of some tropical flower, and feeds upon its juices, picking off, as it does so, the insects

which have found a home there. Its note is quick and sharp and impatient, and it passes from blossom to blossom with great rapidity. The honeyed nectar of flowers is its favourite food, and when in captivity it will sip sugar and water with delight.

It builds a nest a little in the shape of a bottle with a long neck, and suspends it from the extreme branch of a tree. The nest is made of the very fine fibres of plants, and has a round hole on one side, through which the bird can enter.

These brilliant Sun-Birds, with their purple and yellow costumes, are found not only in Ceylon, but also in India. The gardens and groves abound with them, and the tiny nest is constantly seen hanging from the branches of the trees.

The mother Sun-Bird wears a grave and sober attire. The upper part of her body is a plain olive-green, and her throat is

white. The colours of her wings and tail resemble those of her mate.

There is a family of birds allied to the Sun-Birds, and very much like them. They live upon the nectar of flowers, and are called Honey-Eaters.

The beak is long and curved like the Sun-Bird's, and the tongue is divided into two slender filaments. Their costume is not so gay as that of the Sun-Bird's, but there are two or three bright yellow feathers on each wing.

These feathers are highly esteemed by the natives of the South Sea Islands, where the Honey-Eater makes its home.

The chiefs wear them on their royal mantles and robes of state. The robes are ample and flowing, and are completely covered with feathers.

The head-dresses, worn by the ladies of rank, are also made of the same yellow







RESPLENDENT TROGON & CEYLONESE SUN BIRD



10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

feathers, and are considered of almost priceless value.

Another species of the Honey-Eater has scarlet feathers, and these are also used. The idols of the natives are often adorned with them.





## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE PARADISE FLY-CATCHER.



HERE is a bird which comes and goes every summer, and is a bird of passage, like the Swallow and the Cuckoo.

It is not very common, but is more often seen in the northern counties of England than in any other part of our island. When August comes, and while the winter is yet a great way off, it takes its departure. The colours it wears are white, and brown, and gray. It has not the radiant hues of the Tropics, and yet it belongs to a tropical family. We call it the Fly-Catcher.

Its relations are scattered far and wide. One of them is found as far north as Siberia and Kamtchatka, and is called the Dun Fly-Catcher. But, as a rule, the Fly-Catchers inhabit the warmer parts of the globe; and, like the beautiful birds we have been describing, they revel under the burning sun of the Tropics.

They are called Tyrants. This is because of their fierce and combative temper, which, as we shall see presently, causes them to tyrannize over birds much larger than themselves.

One of these Tyrants goes by the name of the Paradise Fly-Catcher. He wears a green crest, while his bill is of a deep blue. The feathers of his head are green, and his body is white and gray. He has a wedge-shaped tail, and the two middle feathers are of a great length. He lives in very hot countries, in India and in Africa.

In India the traveller will often come on a dense thicket of bamboo ; for the bamboo, though really a grass, will grow to the size of a magnificent tree. It shoots up in clumps or clusters, rising to the height of eighty or a hundred feet. The stem is hollow and at intervals forms the same knots or joints that are found in the grasses. From each joint springs a set of branches, which strike out at right-angles to the stem ; and these divide into others, and so on, until the last branch ends in a leaf. In the thicket I am describing all these different branches form a compact mass, crossing and recrossing each other, like a gigantic piece of net-work. At the top of the stem there droop gracefully over, the lovely plumes of the bamboo, which are of the brightest green, and curl like feathers.

A forest of bamboo is one of the most wonderful sights in nature.

The Indian uses the bamboo for every purpose. He makes his house, his bows and arrows, his furniture, all his possessions, in fact, of bamboo. And the glorious thicket of bamboo is like a vast awning for the beautiful birds of the Tropics. Under its deep cool shadow they can live and rejoice.

The Paradise Fly-Catchers make their home here, as in a bower.

They feed on the insects that abound on every hand. The bird perches on some lofty branch, and watches patiently till its prey shall appear in sight. Presently some insect, perhaps a gorgeous butterfly, or one of the numerous insects of the forest, comes fluttering by. Then the Fly-Catcher makes a sudden swoop, and you hear, a moment after, a sharp snap with its beak. You know then that the poor insect is seized and devoured, and

the Tyrant is on the watch for another. Sometimes it will hunt on the branch for the beetles or ants that may be crawling about, and pick them off with its bill.

It is not always content with its leafy home of bamboo. It will visit the gardens, and shrubberies, and plantations, in search of prey ; and having made a circuit, come back again. There are numbers of Fly-Catchers, of different names, and wearing different costumes.

In the tropical parts of America they swarm in great numbers, as the Sparrows do with us. The trees are full of them, each bird intent on its own business of darting after insects, and taking little notice of its companions. At one season the great mounds of earth made by the ants send out colonies of winged ants. Then the Fly-Catchers come prepared for a banquet, and assemble in thousands.

They do not always content themselves with insects ; the larger species of birds will even feed on fish. A gentleman was once sitting at his window, and he heard a splash in a lake close by. Looking out, he spied a Fly-Catcher perched on a dead branch which overhung the water. A moment after, he saw the bird give a plunge, in the same manner as the Kingfisher does. Then it rose again to its branch, and sat, as if drying its feathers. The gentleman watched intently, and he saw the bird dive again into the water, and bring up a tiny fish, just after the manner of the Kingfisher. The dart was made with the rapidity of lightning.

The Fly-Catcher has even been suspected of devouring small animals, for a lizard was once found in its stomach.





## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE KING-BIRD.



ONE of the Fly-Catchers goes by the name of the King-Bird. This title has been given to him because of his behaviour all the time his mate is sitting on her eggs.

At this season his life is one series of fierce battles and quarrels. He quarrels with every bird that ventures near to his nest, and darting out, gives instant battle.

It matters not to what species the bird belongs. Hawks, Crows, even the Eagle himself is certain to be attacked. And

such is the valour of the King-Bird that he is almost sure to be the victor.

The moment he catches sight of his enemy, out he sallies, and rises high in the air. Then he drops suddenly down on the Eagle's back.

The royal bird, surprised to find himself thus attacked, makes efforts to get rid of the burden. He wheels about, and tries by turns and swoops to shake off his rider. But the King-Bird sits firm, and rises only to descend again with greater violence. By his shrill cries and tormenting attacks he drives the Eagle far away from the nest.

The birds cannot be expected to feel any great liking for such a resolute little tyrant. The King-Bird is not at all popular among his feathered companions ; and now and then the tables are turned.

There is a pretty kind of Swallow,

called the Purple Martin, that is a match for him. The wings of the Martin can bear him further, and are stronger and swifter, than those of the King-Bird. He can elude all his attacks, and curve, and sweep, or dart, keeping safe out of his way, and yet provoking him into a rage.

A pair of Martins once built in the same tree on which a pair of King-Birds were rearing their young. No sooner had the mother King-Bird begun to sit upon her eggs than the Martin attacked her mate with great violence. The King-Bird fought with his usual bravery, and the conflict lasted for several days. At last the poor King-Bird was struck to the ground so many times, and with such force, that he died. Then it was an easy matter to drive away his forlorn partner, and the Martins had the tree to themselves.

The Great Red-headed Woodpecker does not tamely submit to the violence of the King-Bird. On the contrary, he amuses himself by teasing him, and playing a kind of bo-peep round the trunk of a tree near to the place where the nest is situated, and where the Woodpecker is searching for insects.

Out darts the furious King-Bird ; but the Woodpecker is far too nimble. He disappears behind the trunk in a minute. But when the baffled King-Bird has returned to his nest, back comes the Woodpecker ; and his great red head plays bo-peep again, as if it were the greatest fun possible.

All the fury of the King-Bird is put on while the young ones are in the nest, and in order to protect them from danger. When the young birds are fledged, and there is no more occasion to fight, he

becomes mild and gentle, and declines any further combats.

He is exceedingly fond of honey, and does a great deal of mischief among the bee-hives. He goes into some garden where there is a row of hives. Then he plants himself on the fence or on the branch of a tree. The poor bees are as busy as usual, collecting their golden stores; and they come humming by, never suspecting any danger. But out darts the King-Bird, and seizes one of them in his bill. He does so every instant. He kills a great number of bees. He even seizes their stores of honey.

The King-Birds appear in the United States of America early in the spring, intending to pass the summer there. They have had a long journey from the more tropical regions, and seem at first rather fatigued, and utter no sound or

note. But they soon recover themselves, and make a sharp, tremulous cry.

They do not like the deep shades of the forest, but choose orchards, or sweet-smelling clover-fields, or even gardens, close by the dwellings of man, and where insects abound.

When they have chosen their partners, they set about building the nest.

They make choice of a branch that shoots out in a convenient manner from a tree. Then they pick up a few twigs to fix upon it, and make a beginning. Next, they fly about seeking for bits of hemp, or wool, or cotton, or whatever they can find.

They place the materials in thick layers or rows, and make a good strong fabric. They line the nest with hair or fibrous roots; and when it is finished the mother-bird lays her eggs.

Then her partner begins to keep watch, and to fight all those furious battles we have been describing.

If you would like to have some idea of his appearance and the costume he wears, I can tell you. His costume is soft and glossy, and the upper part is of a bluish-gray. His tail is black, tipped with white. There is a bright flame-coloured patch on his head, that looks very gay; and his breast is white.

He has a curious manner of flying. As he moves slowly over the field, he makes a vibration with his wings in the same manner as the Hawk does.

Sometimes he hovers like the Hawk, or he dives down to the rich blossoms of the clover, as if to sip their sweetness. Then he ascends, snapping his bill, and making graceful curves in the air, as he larts after various insects.

Sometimes he takes his stand on a tall weed, near which cattle are grazing. Then he waits patiently, his eye following the movements of the troublesome flies that come to attack the herd.

All at once he sees a fly that looks very tempting. He makes a dart, and secures it. Then he returns to the same spot to watch for more.

In the beginning of the autumn, while the weather is yet warm, the King-Birds form themselves into groups, and fly silently and in the night to some spot where the winter cannot come.

The young birds, now in full plumage, join the party. But they meet with enemies on their track. The flesh of the bird is esteemed by many persons as a delicacy ; and they are shot down as they fly.







## CHAPTER XV.

### THE STRANGE EGG IN THE NEST.



THE Great Crested Fly-Catcher, that lives in the woods, has no powers of song, but makes a harsh squeak. Now and then he visits the orchards, and comes in search of the bees in the garden. But he is not fond of fighting, nor has he the courage of his relation the King-Bird.

He feeds as much on berries as on insects; and he makes his nest in the hollow of a tree where a Woodpecker has once lived. The materials for the nest are very scanty. But, mixed with them,

is always a piece of snake-skin, cast off by the reptile when he changes his coat, and which is readily met with in the forest. The nest has never been seen without it; and it forms a soft, silky bed for the young to lie upon. It has even been thought that the sight of the snake-skin coiled round the nest may have the effect of driving away intruders.

The most welcome of all the Fly-Catchers is a bird called the Peewit.

When the Peewit is heard to utter his note, the gardener may begin to plant his peas and beans, and to sow his onions and radishes. The cold weather is sure to be over then.

The Peewit loves to haunt streams and rivers, and to build his nest under the arch of a bridge or in a cave. The nest is made of mud mixed with wax, and is lined with hair and with flax. He will

sit on some twig close by, while the young are being hatched, and utter his peculiar cry of "Pee-wit, pee-wit."

His note has no music in it, and yet it always gladdens the ear. Like the note of the Cuckoo in England, it is associated with the bright days of spring and the opening flowers.

In the middle of the summer his song partly ceases. In the autumn he gives a few notes by way of farewell, and then retreats before the winter.

The Peewit wears a loose crest on his head, and his wings and tail are of a dusky hue. The lower part of his body is of a pale yellow, and his legs and bill are black.

He has a neighbour, called the Wood Peewit, that lives in the gloomy shades of the woods, and chooses some spot where the trees are decaying, and great dead branches shoot across the path.

He is a very clever fly-catcher. He sits on the high dead bough of some tree, uttering a plaintive note. Now and then he gives a dart or sweep after some insect that happens to come near.

Though he loves the forest, he will often venture to the city, and carry on his fly-catching business close to the houses and gardens.

The smallest of the Fly-Catchers is not much bigger than the Humming-Bird; and it is one of the nurses chosen by a bird called the Cow-Bunting to bring up her offspring.

The Cow-Bunting has very much the habits of the Cuckoo. For some reason or other, which no one can yet understand, she does not make a nest or hatch her eggs. But she fixes on a few of her neighbours', and goes from nest to nest, dropping an egg in each. The movements

of the Cow-Bunting have been closely watched by the naturalist. He has seen her flit from bush to bush and copse to copse, seeking the nests suitable for her purpose.

You would not suppose the nest of the little Fly-Catcher would be strong enough to hold the egg. The materials are of the most fragile kind—a few old leaf-stalks, a withered blossom or two, and the stem of a fern, covered over with dry lichen, and lined with horse-hair. This is all.

The nest itself is placed on the branch of a tree, and seems scarcely large enough to contain its owner. But the Cow-Bunting approaches, drops her egg into the frail habitation, and departs.

The tiny Fly-Catchers, returning from their hunt after insects—a hunt carried on from the tops of the tallest trees—find

the egg in the nest. They are for a little time rather excited ; but they allow the egg to remain. Nay, the little Fly-Catcher hatches and brings up the young Cow-Bunting.

In the meantime her own eggs have disappeared. This is always the case when a strange egg has been dropped into the nest. The eggs of the foster-parents vanish before it, and no one has yet found out what becomes of them.





## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE BLUE-HEADED TANAGER.



HERE is a tribe of birds very familiar to us all ; they belong to a large, well-marked division, in the great family of birds, called Perchers and Climbers. They are seen hopping and perching and climbing everywhere, and they are known by the name of Finches.

The poor little Finch is often persecuted by the farmer with much injustice. It is found amongst the corn, and the owner of the field, seeing it very busy, thinks it is making havoc of the grain. But in reality

the Finch is doing nothing of the kind. It is picking out the seeds from some tall, troublesome weeds that grow among the wheat.

If the little Finches were let alone, they would devour an immense quantity of these seeds, and prevent the weed from spreading.

There are vast numbers of the Finch tribe in England, and you know them well. There is the Goldfinch, the Bullfinch, the Chaffinch, and many more. It has been said that the number of weeds they keep under would cover many thousand acres.

How important it is to know our friends from our foes, and to spare the little birds!

The Finch has a relation that lives in the Tropics. He is much more gaily dressed than our humble birds at home.



His colours are brilliant. He wears green, and red, and blue ; and his plumage looks like velvet. He is a very familiar bird in the Tropics, and fills the same place that the Sparrow does at home. He is to be seen everywhere, glittering and flashing among the trees in the garden or orchard. He is not afraid of anything, but hops, and perches, and chirps, and is quite at his ease. He is not called the Finch. He has another name in this part of the world. He is the Tanager. There is a brilliant little bird, called the Scarlet Tanager, that is found in the forests of North America, and that has a glowing band of red on his wings. He is a very sociable bird, and ventures near the abode of man. He will come to the gardens to seek for fruit and insects, and will even place his nest on a tree by the roadside. But as soon as the young Tanagers are

old enough, the parent birds will lead them away southward to escape the winter.

The old birds choose the night as the safest time for flitting, and glide through the woods followed by their little ones. Many families may be seen travelling in this way, on their route to a warmer spot.

The love of the parent birds for their young is very touching. Nothing will induce them to forsake their offspring. I can relate a little story to prove the fact.

A naturalist, who was very fond of studying the habits of birds, once caught a young Tanager, and carried it to his home. He then procured a cage, placed his prisoner within it, and hung the cage on a tree. There was a nest on the tree occupied by a number of young birds called Orioles. The parent Orioles kept flying backwards and forwards to feed

their brood, and the naturalist hoped they would take pity on the little Tanager in the cage, and give it something to eat. But no such thing seemed likely to happen. The parent Orioles were far too busy attending to the wants of their own offspring to notice the Tanager, though they flew close by it. And as the poor little captive refused to be fed by the naturalist, there was some danger lest it should die of starvation.

Such a fate would, indeed, have befallen it, but that a deliverer was at hand. A Scarlet Tanager, full-grown, and no doubt the parent bird come in search of its little one, arrived at the cage, and made an attempt to get in. This it could not do, and after many fruitless efforts it flew away. But very soon it returned, carrying an insect in its bill, which it offered to the captive. This time the hungry little

Tanager did not refuse to be fed, and the parent bird continued to bring insects and other food until night. Then it took up its abode in the tree close by the cage. The Orioles seemed offended at the intrusion, and treated it with the utmost insolence. But the Tanager bore their insults with patience, and seemed resolved that nothing should drive it to forsake its charge. Some time passed, and the young Tanager grew larger and stronger, and quite able to fly. The parent bird did all it could to coax the prisoner out of the cage, and made use of every note and gesture, as it appeared, of entreaty and persuasion. But the bars of the cage presented an obstacle not to be removed, and the poor birds were both of them in despair.

At length the owner of the garden, who had watched all this with great

interest, felt his heart relent. He placed a ladder against the tree, and climbing up to the cage, opened the door. The scene that followed repaid his kindness and humanity. Out came the Tanager, and was received by the parent bird with cries of delight. Then both together, and still uttering notes of rapture, they took the way to the forest.





## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE SUMMER RED BIRD.

**T**HERE is a species of Tanager found in North America called the Summer Red Bird. He is of a rich vermilion colour, with legs and feet of a light blue. He is solitary in his habits, and likes to haunt that part of the forest which is filled with stunted shrubs and trees. But he is careful to keep to the warm districts, and cannot endure the slightest cold. At the least approach of it, he takes his departure, and is, literally, a bird of the summer.

When these Tanagers move from one part

of the country to another, they rise high in the air, and fly by day, instead of during the darkness of night. When night comes they dive into the woods, as if to roost; and their peculiar note may be heard very plainly. The female bird seems to be repeating the words "Chicky, chucky," over and over again. But her partner has a loud and rather agreeable whistle, like a shake on some musical instrument.

The female bird is seldom seen; and her plain costume is hardly to be distinguished from the foliage amid which she hides herself. But the brilliant plumage of her mate flashes and glances hither and thither as he moves about, and renders him an object of the greatest beauty. He is indeed of the number of beautiful birds!

The nest of the Summer Red Bird is fixed on some forked branch of a tree. The birds often choose a tree on the open

road, or in some part of the wood that has been cleared. The nest is made in rather a slovenly manner, of dried stalks and weeds. It is so loosely fixed that a sharp blow may shake it off. The eggs are of a light blue colour, and the parent birds sit upon them by turns, and evince the greatest anxiety for their safety.

The Summer Red Bird feeds on insects, and seems to prefer those of the beetle tribe. He will swallow very large ones indeed, such as you would hardly suppose possible. And he likes to pursue his prey on the wing, as the Fly-Catchers do.

These beautiful birds are often seen perched on the branches of a vine that grows wild in that country, and is called the muscadine. In England we cultivate the grape in hot-houses, with the utmost care; but in the warm parts of America it may be seen everywhere.



Sometimes the vine climbs up the stem of some lofty tree, and turns round and round the branches until it reaches the extremities, when it still goes on growing, and appears to swing in the air. Rich clusters of grapes hang in profusion ; and when they are ripe a shake will bring them down.

The traveller, coming that way, welcomes the sight of the fruitful vine, and stops to refresh himself with its abundance.



—

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

•



